

Student Success Skills: An Evidence-based Cognitive and Social Change Theory for Student Achievement

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ABSTRACT

An overview of the Student Success Skills (SSS) program is offered, including descriptions of the curricular structure, extant research support related to SSS effectiveness for academic achievement and improved school behaviors, and a theory of change for student development. Recent research has demonstrated the value of the SSS program as it connects to student academic achievement and related learning outcomes. To demonstrate how these findings can be generalized as a theory of change in myriad educational circumstances, specific SSS curricular skills and strategies are explicated, including those that are cognitive, attitudinal, self-regulatory, behavioral, and social.

There is a shared belief among scholars in education and cognitive psychology that it is critically important to translate theoretically based strategies into classroom instructional practice in order to realize the most important outcome in education—improved student learning (Toth, Klahr, & Chen, 2000). However, there is frequently a problem in translating this belief into practice in educational environments, perhaps because it is sometimes suggested that cognitive research and instructional practice share little in common and are viewed as mutually exclusive (Klahr, Chen, & Toth, 2001). In contrast, recent developments, including the widespread adoption of the *Common Core State Standards* (CCSS) (2010), have affirmed the importance of cognitive and metacognitive approaches to teaching and learning. As a result, the philosophy and perspective of SSS is timely and relevant in the ways it augments the academic curriculum and supports improved academic outcomes for young learners.

From an educational practitioner's perspective, there is increased pressure on all stakeholders to improve student academic outcomes. Legislative policy, including the federal No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), standards-based reform measures, and school improvement initiatives are all centered on academic achievement as a measure of accountability. These federal and state policies call for the enhancement of educational opportunities for all students. However, the focus of these enhanced opportunities frequently involves additional academic instruction through structured school-based tutoring and remedial programs in targeted areas such as reading, math, and science. While additional academic instruction is important for students who fall behind, many of these students do not possess the

essential cognitive, social, and self-management skills and strategies that are central to learning (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999). As a result, students who would otherwise be able to achieve continue to fall farther behind. Student Success Skills (SSS), an alternative approach to traditional intervention methods, was developed to tap into the learning and social aptitudes in students and educators. The SSS approach is an effective way to merge constructs of cognition and instructional practice to increase the academic success of students.

A number of recent studies have demonstrated the transferable value of the SSS approach to student achievement (e.g., Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman, Webb, & Campbell, 2007; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; León, Villares, Brigman, Webb, & Peluso, 2011; Webb, Brigman, & Campbell, 2005). However, these studies have not fully elucidated the philosophic and theoretical underpinnings of this intervention approach. In the absence of a fully detailed conceptual structure, researchers and practitioners alike are limited in their ability to transmogrify SSS beyond the specific structure of its standardized curricular protocol, limiting its possibilities for effective implementation. This shortcoming is paradoxical, especially given the fact that the essence of the SSS program relies on the induction of certain learning and developmental skills and strategies into myriad learning contexts. Therefore, this article begins with a discussion of the *theory of change* assumed within the SSS program, including a focus on the personal and relational skills and strategies understood to be critical to children's and adolescents' school learning and developmental success. In the case of the former, personal skills and strategies will be largely associated cognitive and affective constructs and, in the case of the latter, relational skills will be associated with caring and nurturing school environments. The commingling of essential personal learning skills and strategies with the necessary conditions in learning environments is the guiding maxim of the SSS approach, and its related philosophies for learning and social development (Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, & Webb, 2011).

Description of the SSS Program

The SSS program includes both a structured classroom (Brigman & Webb, 2010) and a small group counseling (Brigman, Campbell, & Webb, 2010) protocol, developed to serve students and educators in elementary and secondary schools. Each protocol was designed with special attention to research and summative literature from the past 50 years on the most salient skills and strategies that are considered fundamental to successful academic and social out-

comes for students (e.g., Bransford et al., 1999; Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). The SSS program is further supported by a growing body of literature tying social and emotional competence to achievement outcomes, making a strong empirical case linking social-emotional learning to improved behavioral and academic performance for students, including those at-risk for academic failure (e.g., Arbona, 2000; Daly, Duhon, & Witt, 2002; Elias et al., 2003; Hoffman, 2009; Payton et al., 2008; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Considered together, the SSS program operates from the philosophic conclusion that individual student skill and nurturing school environments result in advanced levels of learning achievement, personal development, and system meliorism.

Although the SSS program is driven by a structured protocol and training—and is typically delivered by trained school counselors—the importance of a nurturing environment cannot be over emphasized. School practitioners are trained to use each of the structured protocols and to understand the ways in which the component skills and strategies are used with a class and with individual students. Furthermore, practitioners are trained to work with classroom teachers and administrators on the processes involved in establishing nurturing school communities, which includes attention to classroom climate and how one can infuse the SSS program into the existing school curriculum and culture. To this end, the SSS program engenders a culture in which achievement is possible through its learner-focused curriculum, as evidenced by a successful research history in many related educational environments (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman et al., 2007; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; León et al., 2010; Webb et al., 2005).

SSS and Student Achievement

The SSS program operates from the philosophic supposition that school success is maximal when students and classrooms engage in shared learning and social successes. This assumption is likened to the multidimensional causation postulated by Bandura (1989; 2001) wherein an individual can serve as a proxy for another individual to accomplish a given goal-state. In this manner, personal agency is socially mitigated. With this tenet of causation implicit in the SSS design, the program is potentially effectual in integrating 50 years of best-practice research into operational skills and strategies that students and educators can utilize for success. More encouraging yet, those individuals who experience success in the SSS program can retain, reuse, and replicate these skills and strategies in a diversity of contexts and relationships.

To date, more than 9,000 school counselors and teachers and over one million students in the United States and in 13 other countries have used the SSS program. Within this population, five efficacy studies—involving 1,279 students in grades 4 through 9, 50 school counselors, and 39 schools—consistently found significant increases in math and reading scores on standardized achievement tests (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman et al., 2007; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; León et al., 2010; Webb et al., 2005).

(See Table 1.) Across these studies, Villares, Frain, Brigman, Webb, and Peluso (2012) calculated an overall effect size to demonstrate the practical value of SSS that resulted in .41 for math and .17 for reading. To better illustrate the consequence of this overall effect size on academic achievement, a recent review by Hill, Bloom, Black, and Lipsey (2008) was considered as a point of comparison. Hill and colleagues reviewed dozens of meta-analyses that evaluated the impact of a wide range of educational interventions and programs on reading and math standardized test scores for students in grades K–12, making it an appropriate measure to assess the merit of the SSS program. These researchers found an overall average effect size of 0.23, 0.27, and 0.24 for elementary, middle, and high school students across all interventions.

Hill and colleagues (2008) then measured the impact of a hypothetical intervention with an effect size of .10 on these average annual test score gains and deduced that an intervention with a .10 effect size is comparable to ¼ of an additional year of learning for fourth graders, and ½ of an additional year of learning for tenth graders. For mathematical achievement, a .10 effect size difference is comparable to ⅓ of an additional year of learning for fourth graders and ⅔ of an additional year of learning for tenth graders. Using Hill et al.'s metric, the average SSS effect size of .41 in math is comparable to ⅔ of an additional year of learning for fourth graders and more than two years of additional learning for tenth graders (Villares et al., 2011). Therefore, the average SSS effect size of .17 is comparable to between ⅓ and ½ of an additional year of learning for fourth graders and almost one year of additional learning for tenth graders (Villares et al., 2011). This analysis of the gains in academic achievement facilitated by the SSS curriculum is a noteworthy indication that the introduction of the program is an effective way to foster student achievement in a classroom environment.

In the context of achievement differences between groups of students, the results of the original SSS studies showed improved outcomes for students who participated in SSS curriculum. In addition, researchers were also interested in whether there were differential effects of the program related to ethnicity. Miranda,

Table 1. Summary of Participants and Overall Effect Sizes for Individual Student Success Skills (SSS) Studies				
Study	n	Math ES	Reading ES	Overall ES
A	222	.36	.26	.31
B	307	.51	.23	.36
C	418	.37	.11	.24
D	220	.45	-.03	.20
E	156	.47	.37	.37
Overall	1,323	.41	.17	.29
Note. A = Brigman and Campbell (2003); B = Campbell and Brigman (2005); C = Webb, Brigman, and Campbell (2005); D = Brigman, Webb, and Campbell (2007); E = Leon, Villares, Brigman, Webb, and Peluso (2011); n = number. ES = effect size.				

Webb, Brigman, and Peluso (2007) aggregated data from four previous studies (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman et al., 2007; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Webb et al., 2005) to examine achievement outcomes for White, Latino, and African American students. Aggregated posttest scores for the treatment group were significantly higher than for the comparison group in math and reading with no interaction or main effects related to ethnicity. Thus, White, Latino, and African American students showed similar gains after participating in the SSS program.

SSS Curricular Structure

The SSS curriculum is designed as a K–12 model. It has three distinct program components: Ready to Learn (RTL; Brigman, Lane, & Lane, 2008) for students in grades K–1; Ready for Success (RFS; Brigman & Webb, 2007) for students in grades 2–3; and Student Success Skills (SSS; Brigman et al., 2010; Brigman & Webb, 2010) for students in grades 4–12. There is a supplemental parenting component, Parent Success Skills (PSS; Brigman & Peluso, 2009), which can overlay any of the student-focused components. Each component is based on the same body of research and is driven by the supposition that skill and strategy development and habit formation are maximal if adopted consistently across grade levels and between classrooms. Therefore, repetition is intentionally integrated, while the use of skills and strategies in multiple settings is encouraged. For example, students are introduced to the program in one grade level while being coached and cued to use the skills/strategies during the school year. Students are re-introduced to the program the next school year and continue to be coached and cued to use previously learned skills/strategies in a new context (new grade level with new subjects). Usually the school counselor delivering the program the next year uses a slightly different approach and starts each lesson or lesson segment by asking what students remember about the topic about to be presented, then fills in what was left out. The idea is to reinforce the continued use of these critically important skills/strategies in the new context of a different grade level.

The SSS classroom guidance program involves five classroom lessons, spaced a week apart, usually beginning in late August or early September. Key skills and strategies are introduced using a “tell-show-do” format that follows Bandura’s social learning model (1977). The five initial lessons are followed by three booster sessions, occurring about a month apart, beginning in January. These booster sessions are intended to lead up to standardized testing schedules in the spring to help students tie the important test-taking and self-management skills they have learned to the specific test-taking task, as increased standardized test scores and improved behavior are two measured outcomes of SSS program implementation. Additional outcomes currently under investigation also link improvement in test scores found in the SSS studies to increased motivation to learn, improved self-efficacy, and an increase in behavioral and cognitive engagement. It is hypothesized that if these skills did not improve, standardized test scores and behavior would not have consistently improved at a significant

rate. However, it is noted that the impact of the SSS program is designed to be more far reaching than test taking alone. In fact, the SSS program is directed at students’ day-to-day development, and the implementation and monitoring of skills and strategies aimed at improving academic and social competence. Thus, the program provides students with improved opportunities to learn and grow beyond their successes in testing and other traditional measures of achievement.

The classroom lessons in the SSS curriculum were designed to follow a beginning, middle, and end format. In the beginning, students review previously set goals, monitor progress, and report success around five life skill areas that are tied to increased energy and mood. Students are taught to look for patterns and make connections between their daily habits (e.g., nutrition, exercise, rest, fun, social support) and their mood and energy. In the middle of each session, students learn and practice new skills and strategies they can apply as they target areas for continued improvement. Each week activities reflecting key skills and strategies are organized into five categories: (a) cognitive factors such as memory and learning strategies; (b) attitudinal skills such as building healthy optimism and self-efficacy; (c) self-regulatory skills such as managing attention, anxiety, motivation, and anger; (d) behavioral strategies such as goal setting, progress monitoring, and selecting healthy activities; and (e) social skills such as creating a caring, supportive, and encouraging classroom environment. The end of each session provides an opportunity for students to reflect and share improvements they have made toward designated mastery goals during the previous week and to target areas for improvement for the upcoming week.

For students identified as needing additional support, a SSS small group counseling component is suggested to supplement the skills and strategies presented in the classroom curriculum. Teachers and counselors work collaboratively to identify students who might participate in this component, with a focus on those students with learning, attention, or behavior concerns. The small group component reinforces the use of the aforementioned SSS strategies and adds a social problem-solving piece. Furthermore, the delivery of the content shifts from largely didactic-experiential (as is the case in the classroom component) to dialectic-experiential and, also, focuses on a smaller number of students (six in a small group versus approximately 25 in a classroom). This transition from a didactic, instructional approach in the classroom, to a dialectic, conversational model allows opportunities for students to utilize reasoning and interactional skills and strategies to better understand the concepts under investigation. As students learn and practice these skills and strategies in a caring, supportive, encouraging environment where mistakes are welcomed and small improvements are noticed, their confidence in their abilities increases. Building on this foundation of confidence and newfound skill and strategy relevance, students are charged to generalize learning into larger social and academic arenas.

Whereas the comprehensiveness of the SSS program and its various components aligns with the ASCA National Model

(American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012) (i.e., developmental and pointed at as many students as is possible), there will certainly exist those classrooms where SSS will not be used. In such cases, it is suggested that counselors using SSS continue to encourage the use of the program and infuse its theoretical tenets into the total school culture. Ideally, the successes of students will be contagious and affect the total school culture, thereby recruiting teachers and students to adopt the philosophy of shared success through cooperative endeavors.

Student Success Skills Theory of Change

The SSS program was informed by the literature related to the successful acquisition of knowledge (Wang et al., 1994), as well as those educational interventions and instructional practices that have the greatest impact on learning (Hattie et al., 1996; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). In addition to the personal learning factors associated with success, SSS developers drew from research concordant with youth resilience (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989), and healthy optimism (Seligman, 1998). The resulting program connotes a theoretical supposition that, if students are taught certain fundamental cognitive, social, and self-management skills and strategies in a caring, supportive, and encouraging environment where they feel safe to take risks and try new strategies, their confidence in their abilities will increase, as will their effort in the classroom. Furthermore, in their learning environments, these young people must be reflexively exposed to these mutually desirous skills and strategies, especially as they share a utility related to student development and improved school climate (Lemberger, 2010). Therefore, the philosophical substratum of the SSS program implies that the profound potential of students and school personnel can flourish if each participant is able to activate and share in adopting certain skills and strategies related to achievement and healthy relationships.

In addition to the philosophy that students and school environments have the potential to maximize ability when introduced to certain skills, SSS is informed by a theory of change that suggests that students learn best when trained practitioners infuse cognitive, social, and self-management skills and strategies into their work with learners. Change results when these efforts are contextualized in classroom environments that engender feelings of accomplishment and connectedness. Finally, the SSS theory of change suggests that these efforts can lead to improved cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement, academic self-efficacy, and decreased test anxiety. To use this theory of change to improve the lives of students and school environments, the SSS curriculum includes a number of techniques, each related to the aforementioned skill-strategy-sets associated with student success. While this is not an exhaustive list of the factors necessary for students to thrive, each increases the likelihood that change will occur in a school setting.

While the SSS program teaches specific skills and strategies, counselors using the SSS program elicit the phenomenological perspective of each student in order to ensure that the curriculum

is appropriate for a range of ethnicities and age groups. For example, students are asked to describe the classroom they would look forward to attending each day. What would it “look like, sound like, and feel like?” Ideas are generated by groups of students, captured on chart paper, and posted in the classroom. As a result, each classroom of students, with a diversity of ethnicities and experiences, forms its own ideas about what is needed to feel safe, comfortable, and willing to try new strategies. These insights guide those who provide the SSS program in the classroom because the process of eliciting ideas from students is central to the implementation of the program and allows for contextualized learning.

Student Success Skills and the ASCA National Model

Given that most school counselors and state departments of education adopt the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) to guide the design of comprehensive school counseling programs, SSS was developed to fit within the parameters of this model. The ASCA model calls for school counselors to deliver a comprehensive program that supports the academic, personal/social, and career development of students through classroom guidance, small group and individual counseling, and consultation with parents and teachers. The model also emphasizes the evaluation of the impact of school counseling programs based on students' academic and social performance. Congruent with the ASCA model, the academic element of the SSS program includes approaches to developing critical cognitive strategies, such as noting story structure and increasing memory, and metacognitive strategies, such as goal setting and progress monitoring. Within the personal/social domain, the SSS program includes strategies focused on listening, empathy, encouragement, classroom climate, wellness, and self-efficacy. The SSS model builds on foundational skills and attitudes associated with developmentally appropriate career development, such as ensuring students have the skills and strategies required for academic success and for working collaboratively in small groups. In addition, the SSS program includes a focus on problem solving and continuous improvement.

Regarding the delivery of services, the SSS program aligns with the ASCA model by utilizing both a classroom and small group component. School counselors can also use many of the tools from the SSS program during individual counseling and consultation. In addition, the SSS program has consistently shown that school counselor interventions have strong and positive effects on student performance and in closing achievement gaps (cf., León et al., 2011; Miranda, et al., 2007), which are priorities within the ASCA National Model. This reflects the accountability question that is asked of school counselors using the ASCA model, “How are students different because of your school counseling program?” or “What is the impact on student achievement and behavior of your school counseling program?” The SSS curriculum addresses this key question and provides school counselors with another important tool they can use to gain and maintain support for implementing a comprehensive school-counseling program.

SSS THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of the following section is to transition into the theoretically informed techniques and to describe the applicability of SSS skills as understood to be effectual as a structured program and generally advantageous for schools and students. As previously described, the theoretical constructs explored in the SSS program can be differentiated as personal skills and learning strategies, including both cognitive and affective constructs, and relational skills that encompass the environmental characteristics conducive to learning.

Personal Skills

Cognitive skills. The support of a student's cognitive skills is one of the most critical components of any academic development effort made by a school practitioner (Alexander, 2010). In SSS, cognitive skills and strategies include any epistemic process that the student engages in that is intentional, functional, and adaptive to the various schooling contexts extant to that student. These cognitive processes invariably include memory and learning strategies. Memory strategies represent the ways students retain and activate essential knowledge structures. The extent to which a student conceptualizes and employs these knowledge structures is critical to school success, in particular, for solving complex problems and performing higher reasoning tasks (Bransford et al., 1999). Learning strategies include those cognitive processes used by a student to expand upon prior epistemic knowledge structures and to maximize the development of enhanced or additional structures to achieve the ultimate goal of school success.

The ability to effectively recall prior knowledge is essential to the effective use of knowledge structures and is integral to school success. Without accurate strategies for storing and retrieving knowledge structures, a student will most certainly fail to successfully accomplish most schooling tasks. Many academic tasks such as test taking are closely associated with explicit memory (Berger, 2008), the intentional and effortful recollection of a given knowledge structure. For this reason, the SSS program focuses on the cultivation of explicit memory specifically in school contexts. For example, in an activity called *body location memory pegs*, students are led through an exercise in which a list of a ten foods associated with a healthy diet are spatially and verbally referenced to certain areas of the body. Next, students are provided an opportunity to recite each food item verbally while concurrently identifying the spatial body peg. The exercise is then deconstructed by the group facilitator to elicit the approach used by a student to remember a complex list of items in sequential order. Furthermore, students are encouraged to generalize this strategy to other learning opportunities beyond the food example.

Once memory skills are refined, students need strategies that increase the information stored in memory structure and improve the ways knowledge structures are used. Study strategies are designed to assist students in the development of understanding and skills application. For example, each participating SSS student

is taught strategies to identify salient themes, how to organize these themes and the related information, and how to improve retention of the information. To ensure that these themes are cataloged in usable ways, students are given a graphic organizer that depicts these themes and their organization. Such graphic organizers have been shown to be effective with elementary and secondary students alike (e.g., Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek, & Wei, 2004; Stull & Mayer, 2007). Similarly, the SSS program compels the student to use outlines and note cards to organize information, techniques associated with best practice study strategies (Marzano et al., 2001). Another SSS study skill device is to encourage each student and teacher to share personal strategies in a format similar to that described in the peer assisted learning literature (e.g., Fuchs, Fuchs, Yazdian, & Powell, 2002). Finally, each study strategy is revisited six times by the student to counterbalance any assumed bias that students might have relative to their capacity to remember information (Kornell & Bjork, 2009).

Memory and study strategies must be personally relevant for the student to effectively and consistently transfer these strategies to novel learning opportunities (Schunk, 1984). One way to ensure that this is accomplished is to expose students to the concept of effective storytelling through the use story structure. Each student is introduced to a beginning-middle-end story structure outline and guided through the outline using a familiar book or movie. Then, the student is assigned one of a series of story prompts and provided an organizer (matching story structure outline previously reviewed) to guide the writing and telling of a personal story, including how the characters are feeling at the beginning, middle, and end of the story. The purpose of this activity is to illustrate the sequential nature of events and the way the reader remembers these happenings. In this manner, the student can extrapolate a typical sequence from this example and later apply this memory and study strategy to other narratives they will read or write.

Attitudinal skills. The affective experiences that a student has in and out of classroom environments are critical, as well. Affective experiences include the attitudinal, emotional, and perceptual responses in relationship to any given phenomenon. The SSS program focuses on the acquisition of attitudinal skills that contribute to school success, such as building healthy optimism and self-efficacy. In the evaluation of the constructs of optimism and self-efficacy, research indicates a positive relationship between attitudinal outlook and academic achievement (Caprara, Vecchione, Alessandri, Gerbino, & Barbaranelli, 2011; Huy Phuong, 2011; Payton et al., 2008). Further, a meta-analysis of 50 studies conducted by Solberg Nes and Segerstrom (2006) found that optimism was related to productive coping strategies, which lends conceptual support to the idea that affective skill development can result in achievement comparable to that found in studies that confirm the relationship between optimism and school success (e.g., Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006; Smith & Hoy, 2007). Similarly, self-efficacy—that is, the belief that one can

affect the outcome of a goal-state—has been associated with academic and learning success (Caprara et al., 2008; Pajares, 1996).

Attending to the attitudinal needs of students is integral to academic achievement, as it has been shown that students who are aware of their emotional state can more easily perform academic tasks (Zins et al., 2004). As a skill to be fostered, the SSS program challenges the student to explore emotional states by initiating each lesson with a *temperature check*, a colloquialism designed to illicit the self-perceived high and low points for the week, as defined by a verbal self-assessment of mood and energy. Building on the student's current emotional awareness, the SSS program includes at least two practices to enhance optimism and self-efficacy. The first, *positive self-talk*, is closely associated with school success in the literature in education (Kendall, 1977; McCabe, 2006). The facilitator introduces this skill by instructing each student to refocus attention through the identification of negative thought patterns and negative self-talk, while providing strategies for replacing them with more positive statements. Also, the facilitator of the SSS program taps into the collective optimism of the total classroom by engaging students in a prescribed *optimism chant* encouraging students to doubt their strategies rather than their ability when approaching tasks. The chant also includes the idea of trying something different if your current strategy is not working. In sum, these activities are intended to buttress optimism and efficacy attitudes, helping students in situations where they might have become disengaged from the continued pursuit of a goal when they did not experience success (Mangels, Butterfield, Lamb, Good, & Dweck, 2006).

Self-regulatory skills. Self-regulatory skills such as the ability to actively manage attention, anxiety, motivation, and anger are advanced cognitive skills and strategies that are essential to the success of students in educational environments. Such skill-and-strategy sets are often associated with metacognitive processing in which individuals contemplate and articulate the process of learning (Keller & Bless, 2006; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Whitebread & Coltman, 2010). Learning self-regulatory skills and strategies in the classroom provides students with "metacognitive strategies for planning, monitoring, and modifying their cognition" (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990, p. 33). As higher-order processes, metacognitive and self-regulatory learning are often overlooked in young children; however, evidence suggests that fostering these skills and strategies at a young age may establish a foundation of effective learning strategies, creativity, intrinsic motivation, and continued academic achievement (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Whitebread & Coltman, 2010). Obradovic (2010) explored self-regulatory skills and strategies in relation to academic achievement, school transition, and individual resiliency, and found that, "effortful control," or "a set of executive functions aimed at the intentional, internal manipulation of one's attention and behavior" (p. 110), is positively correlated with adaptive functioning, resilience, and academic success.

In a study of the group counseling component of the SSS program, Lemberger and Clemens (2012) found that 53 inner-city,

fourth- and fifth-grade African American students achieved significant changes in meta-cognitive skill ($f(1, 98) = 23.63, p < .01, p^2 = .19$), and in teacher reports of executive functioning ($F = 4.19, (8, 88), p < .01$, partial eta squared = .28), as compared to a comparable control group of students. Extensive research indicates that these and other types of self-regulatory skills and strategies can be integrated into instructional practice to improve students' higher-order reasoning (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990), mathematical ability (Whitebread & Coltman, 2010), and test performance (Keller & Bless, 2006). Inferentially, the findings from the Lemberger and Clemens study (2012) can be associated with SSS academic achievement findings to support the hypothesis that students might be using self-regulatory skills when exposed to the SSS curriculum and, therefore, these self-regulatory skills may be related to academic skill development.

Behavioral skills. In the SSS program, behavioral skills are conceptualized as applied cognitive skills and strategies, such as goal setting, progress monitoring, and adopting healthy behaviors. These processes allow opportunities to apply previously mastered cognitive skills and strategies to intentional and functional behaviors. The integration of formerly established skill-sets can be actively integrated into the behavioral skills necessary for classroom success, such as behavioral control, attention, and the general behavioral approach to learning (Jennings & DiPrete, 2010). It has been suggested that behavioral skills are reciprocally related to academic achievement, in that academic frustration may lead to maladaptive behaviors, and disruptive behaviors may lead to academic difficulties (Spira, Bracken, & Fischel, 2005). Educators' attention is often focused on the latter assumption of classroom behavior, and therefore, they implement modification strategies to prevent negative behaviors; however, research demonstrates that enhancing positive behavioral skills through classroom curriculum supports academic achievement (Algozzine, Wang, & Violette, 2011; Jennings & DiPrete, 2010). More specifically, positive participatory behaviors in the classroom such as persistence, attention, impulse control, and metacognitive strategies significantly contribute to improved mathematical, literacy, and test taking abilities (Bodovski & Youn, 2011; Spira et al., 2005).

RELATIONAL SKILLS

Social skills. Once students begin to develop mastery of affective and cognitive skills, in the form of behaviors, the transition into relevant and receptive environments is vital for continued growth. Social skills that create a caring, supportive, nurturing, and encouraging classroom environment establish a foundation on which young learners can thrive. As previously discussed, the precepts of SSS rely on effective interpersonal relationships to encourage collaborative problem solving, advanced processing, and risk-taking behaviors in an environment where students feel supported and encouraged. For many students, the introduction of social skills learning is a necessary and novel experience, which provides opportunities to interact with others in more rewarding ways.

In the current climate of concern regarding academic failure and school violence, and an increased understanding of a variety of developmental disorders, a multitude of social skills training programs have flooded the educational field in an attempt to address these matters (Algozzine et al., 2011; Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2005; Ray & Elliott, 2006; Shure, 2001; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). Extensive empirical evidence supports the validity of social skills training in contributing not only to more conducive learning environments, but also, to students' academic achievement (Algozzine et al., 2011; Ray & Elliott, 2006) and metacognitive abilities (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2005). This is not to suggest that one approach or curricular model is more or less effective than another, but it stands to reason that the integration of social skills into daily learning objectives is invaluable for student success.

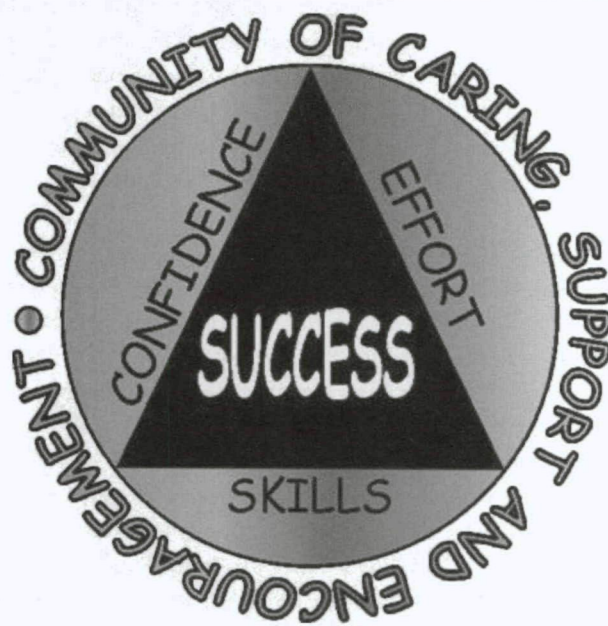
Classroom climate. SSS places a strong emphasis on the classroom climate and includes a variety of activities designed to help students develop positive, caring relationships. Lemberger and Clemens (2012) found that students who participated in the group-counseling component self-reported higher levels of school support, a variable associated with feelings of school connectedness, as compared to students in the control group ($f(1,98) = 4.15, p = .04, p^2 = .04$). Further, school climate and students' feelings of connectedness to that climate are associated with learning successes (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009), and are operationalized in a variety of ways during each SSS activity.

During the first classroom lesson, the students work in groups of three to brainstorm and co-create a poster of what a supportive classroom would look, sound, and feel like. Each group shares their thoughts with the larger group and posts their work in the classroom. With the teacher's permission, the posters remain on the walls in the classroom and can be added to each week. This visual representation is an effective reminder of the expectations in an encouraging classroom environment. Further, the collaborative nature of the process allows students to take ownership in their classroom, encouraging internal motivation and accountability.

Figure 1 depicts the SSS program as a circle with a triangle within. A caring, supportive, and encouraging community encircles the triangle of skills, confidence, and effort. When students are taught these essential foundational cognitive, social, and self-management skills and strategies within a caring, supportive, and encouraging community, the result is greater confidence and sustained effort that will lead to success. The SSS model is focused upon adding successful strategies in all three foundational learning areas, and encloses the skills and strategies students can use to develop caring communities that help sustain effort and positive striving for success. This process includes the classroom teacher in providing modeling, caring, support, and encouragement, as well as communicating ideas embedded in the SSS model, such as: everyone can succeed and, if a strategy is not successful, do not doubt your ability, but instead change your strategy.

Each of the five introductory classroom lessons includes a section on developing and maintaining a caring classroom community

Figure 1. Student Success Skills Conceptual Logo



Conceptual illustration of the Student Success Skills philosophy: The centermost aspect of the logo is a triangle that represents the desired outcome of any SSS intervention, that is success as defined by student or environment. The parameter of the triangle includes those student-level operations necessary for school success. The outer circumference of the circle depicts the relational factors necessary for effective school environments.

and empowers students to take charge. The SSS curriculum reinforces the concept of a caring classroom community through stories that emphasize working cooperatively and the benefits of helping and supporting others. Through text analogies, SSS introduces a framework for telling and re-telling personal stories that includes a prompt for how characters feel at the beginning, middle, and end of their stories, while examining the decisions that result in their feelings. These stories and story telling strategies are also designed to develop positive classroom climate, and raise awareness of story structure, which is connected to listening and reading comprehension. The stories also illuminate social problem solving and provide time to share healthy ways to handle typical issues facing young people. In addition to stories, each week students are asked to remember instances in which they observed a classmate doing or saying something that they considered caring, supportive, or encouraging. In this way, students share successful behaviors and add to the other students' repertoire of strategies. This repetitive exposure is part of the process of making successful strategies explicit, while placing them in the context of daily life, helping students to develop the ability to generalize and benefit from these behaviors.

Developing an environment that increases engagement has several other beneficial byproducts. An environment that allows for mistakes in the learning process communicates a message to students that it is safe to attempt new tasks, and effort is encouraged

and supported regardless of the outcome. Students become part of a collaborative team with the goal to help all students succeed and never doubt anyone's ability, but rather to help them try alternative strategies that may be more successful. This type of climate also creates students' norms for trying hard and being successful, making this a type of behavior to be recognized and supported.

When this kind of classroom climate exists it makes weekly goal setting, progress monitoring, and success sharing more powerful. Through SSS, students learn to use two tools to help them develop goal setting skills and techniques for monitoring their progress. The first, *Looking Good, Feeling Good* is wellness oriented, and the other, *Seven Keys to Master Any Course* is organized around key cognitive, social, and self-management skills and strategies. Each week the students work in pairs to report on progress toward their goals and share successful strategies. If a student is not successful, the partner helps to reframe the lack of progress as a time to try a new strategy and increase awareness of any negative thoughts.

This type of reframing technique is often referred to as "healthy optimism," a key to building a caring supportive and encouraging classroom climate. Healthy optimism is introduced in the first lesson and reoccurs in the remaining four lessons. Students learn to relinquish the tendency to doubt their ability, and instead, doubt the strategy, which has proven to be unsuccessful. If what they are doing is not working, then a new strategy is encouraged. The class works together each week to share successful strategies so that everyone has a growing number of useful techniques to try, and is encouraged to never give up. When teachers and students begin using this concept to increase awareness of self-doubt, a climate of perseverance and sustaining effort is reinforced.

During biweekly goal setting, students learn and practice skills that lead to their ability to listen to others with eyes, ears, and heart (listening, attending, empathy, and encouragement). In addition, students are cued multiple times during each classroom and small group session to practice using these skills. These skills have multiple benefits, including the development of social skills needed for healthy relationships, and the encouragement of collective contributions to strengthen the classroom climate. These skills also help students focus on becoming successful learners, while furthering development of listening and reading comprehension.

The last strategy tied to classroom climate is teaching the language of encouragement. Students are presented with multiple examples of encouraging words and actions. After students are provided with concrete illustrations of encouragement, they are asked to generate additional examples to increase their individual mastery of the concept. The students then record their language of encouragement examples on a poster, similar to the *Looks Like, Sounds Like, and Feels Like* poster that was completed in lesson one. Over time, additions are made as other examples are naturally discovered. Students are taught several cognitive reframing statements which aim to replace negative self-doubting language with healthy optimistic language. Two examples are: "That's not like you to _____ (fill in negative behavior), you are usually more _____ (fill in preferred behavior)," or after hearing a student say

something such as, "I just can't get this, I have never been good at _____," reframing the statement as, "So, up until now you have found that really tough, from now on you can try something different. Let's put our heads together and come up with a new strategy."

Finally, the SSS program was developed to extend beyond individual counseling activities to the traditional classroom and total school environments. For example, teachers are strongly encouraged to remain in the classroom during these five lessons and observe the teaching of the skills and strategies so they can cue their students to use them when appropriate. The strongest results occur when teachers coach and cue students to activate the skills/strategies on a regular basis throughout the school year. This type of follow-through is considered extremely important to the development of any new skill or strategy, making new learning and social and self-management habits more likely to develop. Similarly, as part of the SSS program, school counselors present to teachers a 20-minute explication of the theory and research related to SSS. These actions are intended to create a culture of optimism and shared language around SSS and student achievement.

CONCLUSION

Student Success Skills is based on the fundamental principle that change occurs when students are encouraged to develop holistically in a supportive and nurturing educational environment. Given the necessary conditions for students' potential to emerge, it is more likely that they achieve mastery in their cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social abilities. Effectual educational environments must foster potential through intentional instructional strategies that address the complex needs of students. In a time when academic achievement is viewed as the absolute indicator of educational success, it is intimidating to allocate time to less traditional areas of education such as attitudinal and social skills. However, substantive evidence supports curricular designs such as Student Success Skills in effectively improving traditional markers of achievement, while simultaneously teaching skills and strategies required for success as a lifelong learner. With an influx of curricular models and suggestions for improving a variety of student skills and strategies, the practical application of theoretical constructs of SSS into daily classroom endeavors may seem challenging to educators.

It is becoming increasingly important for school counselors to show how their work contributes to improved achievement outcomes for students. While counselors do not teach academic content, they can collaborate with other educators to implement programs such as SSS to teach skills and strategies that support learning and improve academic achievement. It is also clear that legislative policy, including the federal reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), standards-based reform measures, and school improvement initiatives all focus on academic achievement as the central measure of accountability. Coupled with current local, state, and national fiscal deficits that impact the funding of public

Figure 2. SSS Theory of Change

Intervention Focus		Target Skills		SSS Activities		Success Outcomes	
1) Personal Skills (teacher and student)	➡	1a) Cognitive Skill	➡	1a) Picking out the most important ideas, graphic organizers, concept mapping, chunking, location memory, and story structure	➡	1) Increased learning performance, improved learning and social behaviors, and more intentional actions and feelings	
		1b) Attitudinal Skill		1b) Goal setting, progress monitoring, success sharing (Keys to Course Mastery, Looking Good Feeling Good)			
		1c) Self-regulatory Skill		1c) Learning the language of optimism, setting goals, looking for small improvements, sharing successes, and positive student story telling			
		1d) Behavioral Skill		1d) Performing under pressure and managing anxiety by using imagery (Safe Place), breathing (Breathe, Picture, Focus), positive self-talk, music (Kool Tunes), test taking strategies, and mental practice (Picturing Success)			
↕		↕		↕		↕	
2) Relational Skills (teacher and student)	➡	2a) Social Skill	➡	2a) Empathy training, situational rehearsals, and pair sharing	➡	2) Feelings of connectedness, increased contribution, and improved relationships	
		2b) Classroom Climate		2b) Creating a caring, supportive, and encouraging classroom community by teaching attending, listening, and empathy skills, and the use of encouragement			

school education, school counselors are at-risk of being considered “expendable” as budget cuts are made. This reality is reinforced by a Delphi Study undertaken to identify and rank order the most important research needs for the school counseling profession (Dimmitt, Carey, McGannon, & Henningson, 2005). The results suggested a focus on the development and identification of interventions for school counselors to help to improve academic outcomes for students and reduce dropout and school failure rates. The link between school counselors’ contributions and students’ success is critical for all concerned.

SSS also addresses practical needs related to school counselors’ contributions to the curriculum in several ways. First, while teachers focus on developing students’ cognitive capacities and teaching academic content and strategies, they often lack the time and resources to create a classroom climate in which students can learn the attitudinal, behavioral and social skills that are essential components of SSS. Second, while there are programs that focus on the development of social and self-management skills and creating encouraging and supportive classroom climates, few of these programs have been studied and thus, there are no data to support their effectiveness (Carey & Dimmitt, 2008). Using

research-validated programs that target improved academic and behavioral outcomes is an essential contribution to helping students to achieve their optimal learning potential. Third, there are few programs that recognize the importance of combining the development of cognitive, metacognitive, social, and self-management skills and strategies, and the creation of supportive/encouraging classroom environments. The SSS program was designed to be implemented by professional school counselors to address this critical combination, solidifying the role of the counselor as a unique member of the school based team who can contribute to improved academic outcomes for students.

The theory of change offered by the SSS program has the potential to enhance instructional practices and foster the development of student school success. (See Figure 2.) Specifically, the SSS program provides counselors with a new and shared language and set of practical strategies to infuse into everyday practice in order to achieve the shared goals of cognitive and personal development of all learners. A successful learning environment inherently holds possibilities for students to develop and prosper as autonomous learners with the abilities to achieve academically, socially, and emotionally.

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